

**Homily – Father Brad Neely
Corpus Christi Sunday, Year A
Peter and Paul; Nezperce: Jun 26, 2011
Dt 8: 2-3, 14b-16a; 1Cor 10: 16-17; Jn 6:
51-58**

Last year, (2010) Ignatius Press released a collection of some of Pope Benedict's talks and homilies on the Mass and the Eucharist, entitled: Heart of the Christian Life: Thoughts on the Holy Mass. The second chapter of the book is titled: "Without Sunday, We Cannot Live." Benedict takes us back to the year 304AD, when the Emperor Diocletian forbade Christians, *on pain of death:*

- *from possessing the Scriptures,
- *from gathering on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist,
- *and from building places within which to hold their assemblies.

The Pope recalls:
"In Abitene, a small village in present day Tunisia, forty-nine Christians were taken by surprise one Sunday while they were celebrating the Eucharist, gathered in the house of Octavius Felix, thereby denying the imperial prohibitions. They were arrested and taken to Carthage to be interrogated by the Proconsul Anulinus. Significant among other things is the answer a certain [man] Emeritus gave to the Proconsul, who asked him why on earth they had disobeyed the Emperor's severe orders. [Emeritus] replied, "*Sine Dominico non possumus:*" that is---"we cannot live without joining together

on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist. We would lack the strength to face our daily problems and not to succumb." (p12).

We do not have the experience of facing death for attending Mass and receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. Pope Benedict claims, therefore, that the Sunday precept is *not* a burden on our shoulders. Rather, it is a **need** for Christians, it is a **joy**. He says, "Christians can thus replenish the energy they need to continue on the journey we must make every week." The Pope claims that "this is not an **arbitrary journey**--- the path God points out to us [in Christ] goes in the direction *inscribed* in [our] very existence." (p13) The longing for fulfillment in God is built right into us! Benedict continues: "Going with Christ means fulfilling ourselves. . . The Lord. . . **wishes to share our destiny to the point of identifying with us.**" (p14)

Think about these words as we continue, "Christ wishes to share our destiny to the point of identifying with us." In looking at this Sunday's readings, I recalled one of the psalms that was part of the Church's Liturgy of the Hours this past week: Psalm 139. Here are its beautiful and intimate words: "*Lord, you have probed me, you know me: you know when I sit and stand, you understand my thoughts from afar. My travels and my rest you mark; with all my ways you are familiar. Even before a word is on my tongue, Lord, you know it all.*"

*Behind and before you encircle me
and rest your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is beyond me,
far too lofty for me to reach.
Where can I hide from your spirit?
If I fly with the wings of dawn
and alight beyond the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand hold me fast....
You formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother's womb....
My very self you knew....."*

Given these words of the psalm,
let's revisit Pope Benedict's assertion:
"The Lord...*wishes to share our destiny
to the point of identifying with us.*"
Even with the intimate relationship
described by the psalmist in 139,
God did not stop there!
So great was His desire to "identify with us"
that He took flesh and dwelt among us.
(Emmanuel = God with us).
God desired to take the relationship
described in Psalm 139
to its fullest measure,
defeating the consequences of sin----
that consequence being, human death.

It is interesting then,
that Pope Benedict would also say
later in this second chapter,
that "...one might say that basically
people do not want to have God so close...
we..often want Him to be a little distant
from us" (p14)
This statement sounds, at the same time odd,
and at the same time, perhaps familiar.
We have to ask ourselves,
"what do we observe in our own faith life
concerning our relationship with Christ?"
Do we give ourselves to it 100%---
or do we withhold a percentage to
ourselves?
Do we hold back?
If we *did* give our whole selves to Christ,

(who gave his whole self to us),
what might we have to do?
Do we even want to find out?

As Pope Benedict continues in the second
chapter,
he teaches us that:
"in the Eucharist, [Christ's] presence
is *not static*.

It is a *dynamic* presence that grasps us,
**to make us His own,
to make us assimilate Him.**" (p15)
This is rather incredible.

To assimilate, according to Webster's,
is to "take in, and incorporate as one's own;
to absorb."

Christ gives us himself in the Eucharist
so that we "absorb" Him, and make Him our
own!

Thus, Christ giving us His body and blood,
soul and divinity,
is not a casual thing,
and is not to be treated casually.
Does it not merit our total self-giving in
return?

Given all of this,
Pope Benedict maintains that:
"we must proudly rediscover the joy of
Christian Sundays.
We must proudly rediscover
the privilege of sharing in the Eucharist,
which is the sacrament of the renewed
world." (p16)

In the conclusion of chapter two,
the Pope asks:
"How will we be able to live without Him?"
This question has already been answered
some 1700 years ago:
Sine dominico non possumus.
[Without Sunday We Cannot Live]